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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to furnish the necessary context and background information for an understanding of the role and functions of the Queensland, Australia Pre-School Correspondence Program. This educational service, the first of its kind in Australia, occurred within the context of a policy to provide one year of free preschool education for all children aged 4-5 years within the State of Queensland. It is directed toward children in remote areas. Lessons consist of a printed program with suggested activities for parents to use with recorded material or cassette tapes, library resources and a kit of equipment. This paper provides an overview of Queensland's geography as well as an outline of Queensland's educational system and tables presenting such demographic data as school enrollments, home background, age distribution, remoteness from school, illnesses among school children, and equipment available to the parents. (MS)

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No. 1 in a series on the evaluation
of the Queensland Pre-School Correspondence Program

THE PRE-SCHOOL CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM: BACKGROUND

PS 008836

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December 1975

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INTRODUCTION

In 1974 the Queensland Department of Education introduced a Pre-School Correspondence Program. This educational service, which was the first of its kind in Australia, occurred within the context of a policy to provide one year of free pre-school education for all children aged 4–5 years within the State of Queensland whose parents wished their children to be enrolled. More specifically the Pre-School Correspondence Program was aimed at providing a form of home-based, parent-taught pre-school education for children whose families lived in remote and isolated parts of the State and who would not have the opportunity to regularly attend sessional pre-schools. Because this Pre-School Correspondence Program was a new innovation in Queensland an evaluation of its development and operation is being undertaken.

This paper provides an overview of Queensland's geography as well as an outline of Queensland's educational system. It is intended to furnish the necessary context and background information for an understanding of the role and functions of the Pre-School Correspondence Program. In addition, the paper presents details of the 1975 enrolments.

This paper should provide a frame of reference for interpreting the relevance of the evaluation project's findings. The geographical distribution of the families enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program can be interpreted in the light of the distribution of the general population. Similarly, the provisions of the Pre-School Correspondence Program can be judged in terms of other services available to isolated children.

QUEENSLAND IN BRIEF

The State of Queensland, with an area of 1 728 000 square kilometres, occupies the north-eastern portion of the Australian continent. The State's land area represents 22.5 per cent of the continent and 31 per cent of the occupied area. From north to south its greatest distance is 2100 km and from east to west it is 1450 km. Queensland is equivalent in area to France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, West Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Spain together. It has 5200 km of coastline with sea boundaries which take in the Torres Strait, a large part of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the Great Barrier Reef.

Queensland has a typical sub-tropical to tropical climate, which has proved itself suitable for settlement in all parts of the State. High daytime temperatures are a normal feature of the period from October to March, resulting in a relatively short spring and a long summer. The very high inland temperatures are usually associated with low humidity in summer. In winter, the inland days are warm and sunny with cold nights. Coastal Queensland has a fairly high humidity in summer; alleviated somewhat by almost daily sea breezes.

Four landscape regions may be recognized in Queensland: the Eastern Highlands, the Western Plains, the North-Western Uplands, and the islands and reefs which project above the Continental Shalf. The Great Barrier Reef has been formed by the growth of corals, algae, and other marine organisms on a continental shelf which ranges from 19 km wide near Cooktown to over 240 km wide near Rockhampton, and covers a total length of some 19 000 km (Queensland Government, 1974).

The average annual rainfall varies from about 150 mm in the desert of the extreme south-western corner of the State to about 4000 mm in parts of the sugar lands of the wet north-eastern coast. The mean rainfall for Queensland is 580 mm per annum. Every part of Queensland receives more rain in the summer six months (November to April) than in the winter six months (May to October). The concentration of rain in the summer months is greatest in the north and west where it constitutes the 'wet season'. Rainfall is by

far the most important weather factor in Queensland rural production. An ever present threat to production in Queensland is the occurrence of drought which can devastate pastures and crops and cause heavy stock losses. Severe droughts with low rainfall for more than a year, are occasionally experienced in inland Queensland. Further towards the western border of the State rainfall is lower and more unreliable.

Queensland's population of over 2 000 000 represents 14.5 per cent of the Australian total. The greatest population concentration is in the south-eastern corner of the State with a lower density along the coastal belt east of the Great Dividing Range. In common with oth other Australians, Queenslanders are one of the most urbanized people in the world despite the vastness of the land. The clear tendency towards urbanization, has resulted in 79 per cent of the population living in urban centres.

Throughout the western inland regions, where the industry is almost entirely pastoral, the population is sparsely distributed. The population distribution throughout the State is shown in Figure 1. Only one-sixth of Queenslanders live outside urban centres in conditions that can be described as rural. In addition to families in pastoral occupations, others in the construction, mining, fishing and other industries may live outside urban centres.

The mining industry, in particular, is located in widely separated parts of the State determined by the type of minerals being sought. It is for families such as these who live in small isolated pockets of Queensland that correspondence education was intended to cater for their pre-school children. Without this service, few of these families would have access to pre-school facilities.

EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND

Education is a major function of the Queensland State Government, absorbing 22 per cent of the annual budget. The State Department of Education has to provide educational facilities for students scattered over a vast area and this gives rise to problems where the principal of 'equality of opportunity' is to be upheld.

In Queensland, attendance at school is compulsory between the ages of six and fifteen. The average age of children at each level at 1 August 1975, that is at the beginning of the seventh month of the school year, is shown in Table 1. Parents may now enrol their children in a non-compulsory pre-school year where facilities are available. The school year begins for children in late January and finishes in early December and comprises 42 weeks of instruction.

Table 1: Average Age of Students in State Schools at Each Level of Education

Level	Primary							Secondary				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Average age (yrs. mths)	6.0	7.2	8.2	9.3	10.3	11.3	12.3	13.4	14.3	15.3	16.2	17.4

at 1 August 1975

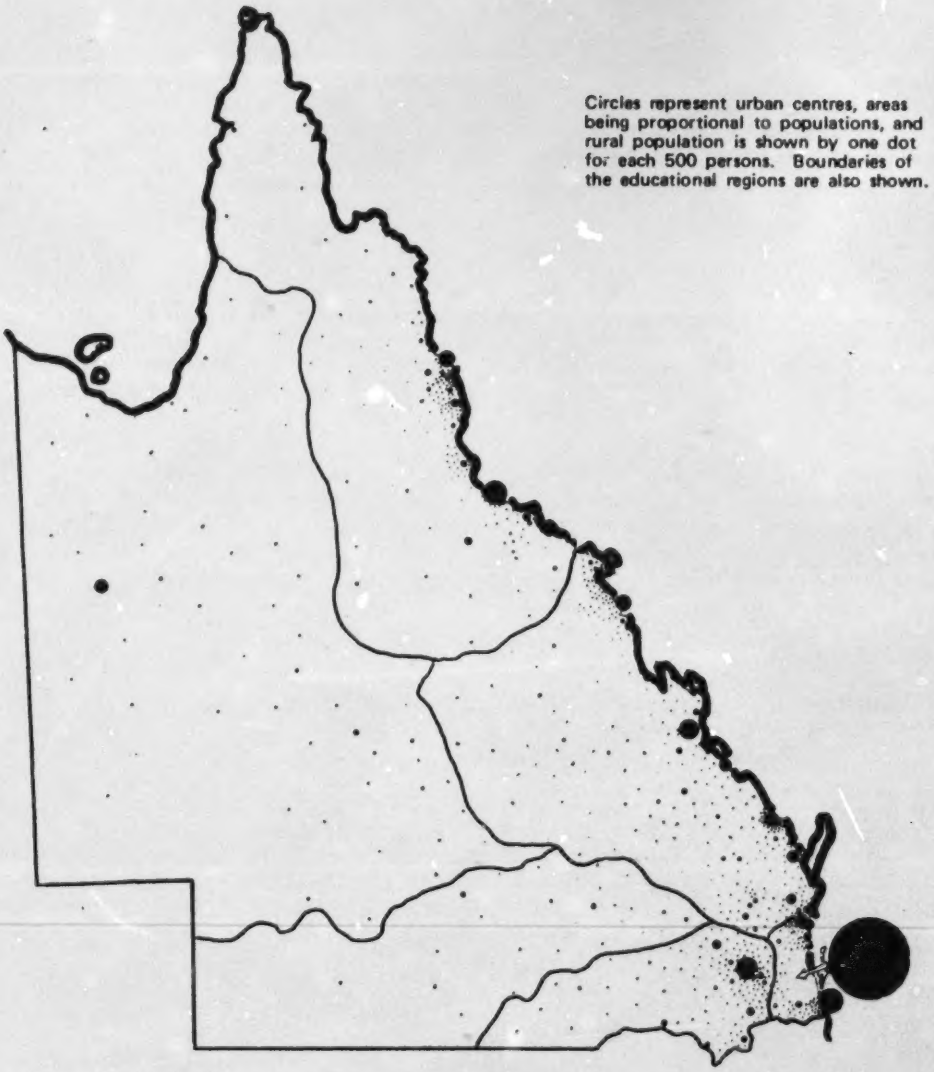
Circles represent urban centres, areas being proportional to populations, and rural population is shown by one dot for each 500 persons. Boundaries of the educational regions are also shown.

Fig. 1: Distribution of Population in Queensland at 1971 Census

At 1 August 1975, 431 877 students were enrolled in Government and non-Government schools. Figure 2 gives a diagrammatic representation of the breakdown of all school enrolments. The majority of educational facilities are provided by the State Government, with some 80 per cent of primary and 70 per cent of secondary school students attending government schools.

Pre-School Education

In 1972, the Government announced its intention of providing free pre-school education for all four to five year old children whose parents wanted their children to attend. In 1973, the first State pre-school centres were available for voluntary attendance by children of appropriate age irrespective of whether or not they would proceed to a State primary school the following year.

By the beginning of 1975 there were 146 such units, each catering for up to fifty children during the two half-day sessions. A total of 354 units will be in operation in 1976. At 1 August 1975 there were 9355 children enrolled in Pre-School Units. This figure represents 45 per cent of all children who were eligible to enter primary school at 27 January 1976. The distributions of the ages of pre-school children enrolled in State pre-school programs and the numbers of teachers and aides are shown in Table 2. The special pre-school centres provided for physically handicapped children of pre-school age but accepted them at an earlier age than the centres. The children in the centres who were under four years of age were attending former community kindergartens taken over by the Department of Education at the request of their management committees. They were allowed to continue in attendance even though not eligible to enrol in other State pre-school centres. The special correspondence program, operated out of the School for the Deaf, provided for pre-school children with hearing loss who were unable to attend pre-school units for the deaf.

Table 2: Numbers of Teachers and Aides and Age Distribution of Children in Government Pre-Schools

	Pre-school Centres	Special Pre-school Centres	Pre-school Correspondence Unit	Special Pre-school Correspondence	Total
Numbers of Children					
Under 3 years	4	61	0	10	75
3 years	62	72	0	10	144
4 years	4539	96	248	12	4895
5 years	3900	65	198	11	4174
6 years and over	42	23	1	1	67
Total	**8547**	**317**	**447**	**44**	**9355**
Numbers of Teachers	**210**	**28**	**20**	**1**	**259**
Numbers of Teacher Aides	**232**	**25**	**8**	**0**	**261**

At 1 August 1975

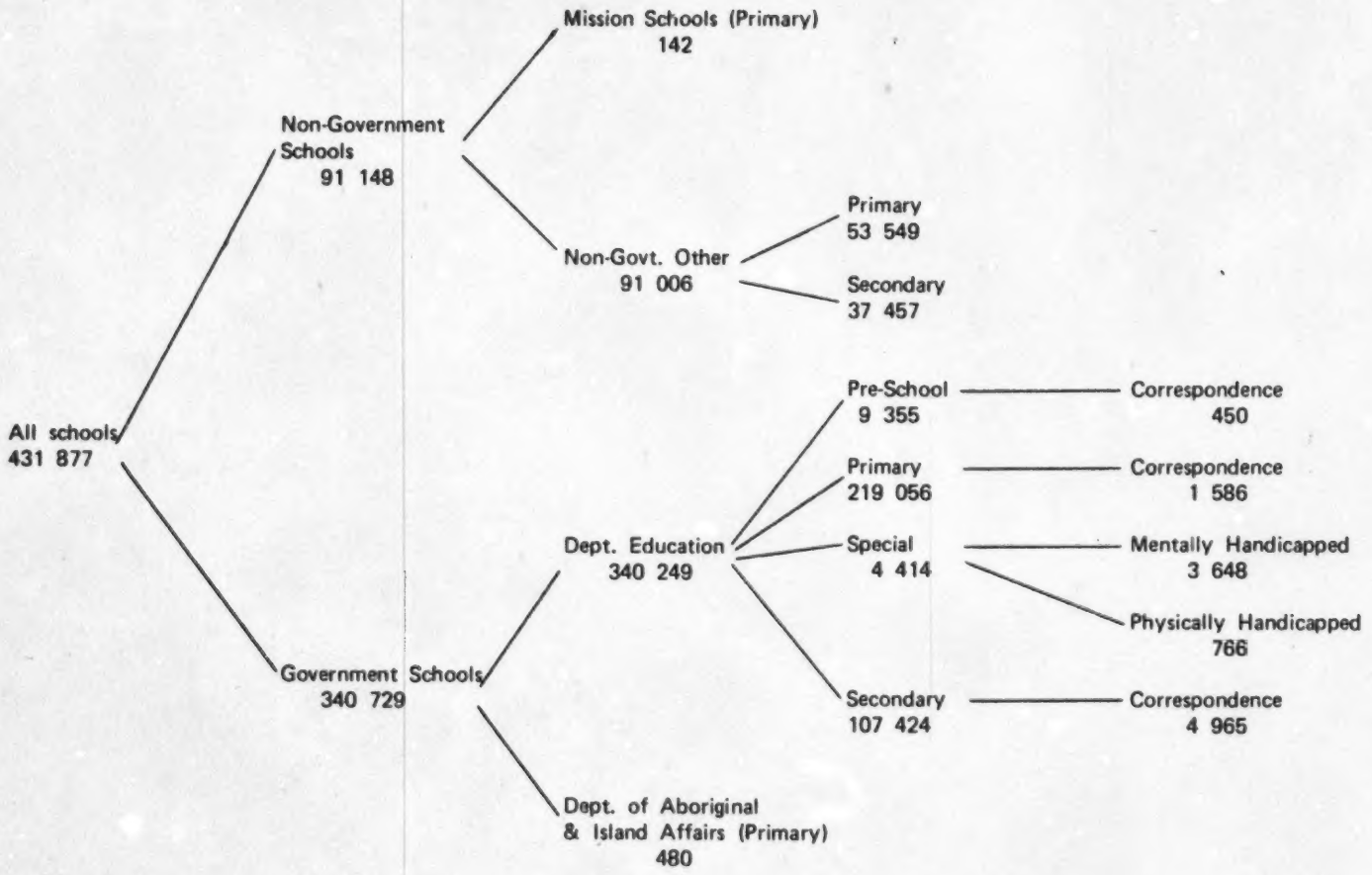

Fig. 2 Distribution of Enrolments in Queensland Schools

Pre-school units are staffed by a teacher and a teacher's aide and, although generally located in the grounds of existing primary schools, are quite separate from them. Pre-school teachers have access to advisory personnel within the pre-school branch of the Department for guidance and support. Advisory teachers and Regional Pre-School Officers have several pre-school units assigned to them for supervision. Pre-school groups have also been established for hearing impaired, visually handicapped, and other physically handicapped children. These are in separate units in country centres or attached to special schools or pre-schools in larger centres.

The main functions of pre-schools as stated by the Department are to provide a bridge to enable the young child to make a smooth transition from home to school, to encourage parents to take an interest in early childhood education, and to develop in the children, abilities, skills, and attitudes which would help later in their education.

In addition to the State Government pre-school facilities, there are community kindergartens, officially affiliated with and accredited by the Creche and Kindergarten Association, which have provided for the educational needs of pre-school children in many parts of Queensland for years. Kindergartens differ from Government pre-schools in that they are run by voluntary committees drawn from the local communities which they service. At 1 August 1975 there were 9723 children attending kindergartens. Their age distribution is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Children in Affiliated Community Kindergarten

Age	Number of Children
Under 3 years	2
3 years	1811
4 years	5518
5 years	3982
6 years and over	10
Total	9723

at 1 August 1975

Primary Education

For administrative purposes the State is divided into nine educational regions, the boundaries of which were shown in Figure 1. The number of State primary schools and their total enrolment in each region at 1 August 1975 is shown in Table 4. The total primary enrolment at 1 August 1975 was 217 470 and the distribution of students among the regions clearly reflects the general population distribution shown in Figure 1. The 1586 correspondence students were almost all children in remote areas who were not within daily travel of school. Only a few were adults seeking to complete primary education.

Primary schools in Queensland provide a seven year program with entry to Grade 1 allowed if a child is 5 years of age by the last day in February in the year of enrolment and compulsory if he is 6 years of age by that date.

Table 4: State Primary School Enrolments in Different Educational Regions

Region	Numbers of Students	Numbers of Schools
Brisbane North	42 434	108
Brisbane South	49 760	125
Brisbane West	25 740	119
Darling Downs	14 271	120
Wide Bay	17 378	133
Central	23 994	151
Northern	29 849	159
North Western	7 392	54
South Western	6 652	63
Total	217 470	1 032

at 1 August 1975 (excluding 1586 correspondence students)

Primary school students cover such subjects as language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, art, music and physical education. These curricula are set out in curriculum guides established by the Department of Education but teachers are free to modify them to suit local conditions and requirements.

In recent years a number of support services have been inaugurated to supplement the work of primary school staff. An advisory teacher service, initiated in 1970, is available upon request by a Principal to provide staff with information about new developments and interpretations of curricula. Further support services are provided through Curriculum and Media Branches. In 1973 the first teacher aides were appointed to assist teachers mainly by taking over non-instructional tasks such as the preparation of equipment and materials. The first library aides were also appointed in 1973, to carry out essential tasks such as covering new books, keeping records up to-date, and recording loans and returns to ensure the smooth running of school libraries.

Secondary Education

The numbers of secondary schools and their total enrolment at 1 August 1975 are shown in Table 5. Of these schools 118 are full high schools offering a five year program and 65 secondary departments attached to country primary schools and under the charge of the primary school principal. Only five of the secondary departments offered five year programs, with the remainder providing only the first three years.

Since the school leaving age is 15 years, most students complete the first three years of secondary education from Grade 8 to 10 within their years of compulsory schooling. Approximately 44 per cent of students who complete Grade 10 continue their education beyond that level in Grade 11. The first year of the secondary program provides students with an opportunity to settle into secondary school life and to discover where their interests and abilities lie. The subjects offered in Grades 9 and 10 are

governed to some extent by the size of the school, the availability of staff and the number of students who wish to attempt the subjects.

Table 5: State Secondary School Enrolments in Different Educational Regions

Region	Numbers of Students	Numbers of Schools	
		High Schools	Secondary Departments
Brisbane North	20 633	20	3
Brisbane South	23 958	23	0
Brisbane West	11 769	13	4
Darling Downs	7 214	9	11
Wide Bay	9 092	13	11
Central	10 398	14	10
Northern	13 798	20	6
North Western	2 502	2	9
South Western	3 095	4	11
Total	102 458	118	65

at 1 August 1975 (excluding 4965 correspondence students)

At the end of the third year, each student receives a Junior Certificate of achievement which is school based, but supervised by a Board of Secondary School Studies. This certificate constitutes terminal award for those students wishing to enter the workforce at that stage. Courses of study for the fourth and fifth years are designed to provide a sound general education and to prepare students for entry to tertiary institutions or to particular occupations. The Senior Certificate, awarded at the end of the Grade 12 year, provides school based assessments of achievement with the task of ensuring comparability of assessments between schools again being the responsibility of the Board of Secondary School Studies.

Special Education

The numbers of children attending each type of special school were shown in Figure 2. The distribution of these children in each of the State's educational regions, at 1 August 1975, is shown in Table 6.

These services provide for children who are mentally or physically handicapped, and children in hospital. There are also special facilities available for children with specific learning disabilities.

Table 6: State Special School Enrolments in Different Educational Regions

Region	Numbers of Students	Numbers of Schools	
		Separate Schools	Classes in Primary Schools
Brisbane North	1 168	11	4
Brisbane South	1 286	11	6
Brisbane West	409	5	1
Darling Downs	264	2	2
Wide Bay	283	4	2
Central	321	3	2
Northern	546	6	6
North Western	67	1	0
South Western	70	0	2
Total	4 414	43	25

at 1 August 1975

Post Secondary Education

At 1 August 1975, 8795 students were enrolled in technical colleges. Many of these students were apprentices undergoing training for skilled trades. The apprenticeship courses, previousiy offered on a year round part-time basis are being increasingly organized on a seven-week block release basis under which the apprentice receives concentrated off-the-job training. This makes training available to all apprentices in Queensland on an equal basis by reducing the dependence of country apprentices on correspondence courses.

Tertiary education is offered through three universities whose total enrolments in 1975 were 20 867, and through ten Colleges of Advanced Education with 1975 enrolments of 13 491. Two of the universities and six of the colleges of advanced education are in Brisbane and the remainder are in the larger provincial cities.

EDUCATION IN ISOLATED AREAS

Provisions for Isolated Children

Following the Education Act of 1875 provision was made for the education of children who could assemble in one place in sufficient numbers to justify the establishment of a school. A system of itinerant teachers was introduced to provide teachers to visit isolated children four times a year. In 1922 the Primary Correspondence School was established and the itinerant teacher scheme was phased out.

In addition to the itinerant teacher scheme and the Primary Correspondence School, the provision of education facilities in rural areas of Queensland was made through the establishment of a considerable number of small one and two teacher schools. Although 38 per cent of schools are still of this type, their numbers have decreased rapidly in recent years as improved transport facilities have allowed a policy of consolidation into larger central schools.

During the last ten years, increasing numbers of primary and secondary school children have been transported daily to larger schools. During 1974–1975 over 1180 separate school transport services were in operation. Of these 893 served primary schools and 279 and 10 were to secondary and tertiary institutions respectively. The State Government financed the transport of these children. If a child lives more than three miles from a school, his travel by licensed bus service is paid for by the Department of Education. In cases where the child is driven to the nearest school in a private vehicle, the parent is eligible to receive financial assistance for each child transported.

Remote area allowances are payable by the State and Commonwealth Governments to all students, irrespective of family income, who are compelled to live away from home to attend school because they do not live within daily travelling distance of a school. Free railway passes are also provided thus enabling children to travel home on weekends and each vacation during the year.

Primary Correspondence School

The Primary Correspondence School in Brisbane provides educational opportunities for children unable to attend school on account of illness or distance from school, and for adults who had failed to complete their primary education as a child.

Written lessons are sent to pupils and their exercises are marked and returned. These are supplemented in some cases by radio lessons transmitted over the Schools of the Air's radio broadcasts.

The Primary Correspondence School had a total enrolment of 1586 children at 1 August 1975. Each teacher is responsible for about 25 children who work in an ungraded system progressing through grade levels according to their individual academic achievement.

Schools of the Air

The School of the Air aids primary correspondence students by making about half an hour of air time available to daily groups of students who have transceivers. In this time the child and his governess or parents can ask questions about specific areas of in interest or problems. It allows the teachers at the School of the Air centre to help the child with oral pronunciation and assign enrichment exercises to meet the individual needs and interests of the pupils.

Through the four Queensland School of the Air centres, about 600 children are accommodated. Schools of the Air in Queensland work with the co-operation and assistance of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and its radio transmission facilities. (Department of Education, Queensland 1974).

Secondary Correspondence School Courses

The Secondary Correspondence School in Brisbane provides tuition for students unable to attend an established secondary school because of remoteness, illness or other disability. Those who have left school and wish to further their education but are unable to attend evening classes are also eligible to enrol. In country areas where there are technical colleges evening classes are conducted to enable students to study for Junior and Senior Certificates on a part-time basis without resort to correspondence instruction.

Post Secondary Courses

The Technical Correspondence School, situated in Brisbane, provides courses for those who are unable to attend technical college classes regularly. At 1 August 1975 a total of 17 278 students were enrolled in trade and advanced trade courses as well as almost 3623 students in other courses.

Country apprentices in some trades are provided for by the block release scheme which enables them to receive full-time practical training for seven weeks at a technical college rather than part-time correspondence training. For apprentices residing in centres up to 80 km from a technical college free transport to the college is provided to enable them to receive their part-time instruction face to face. This transport service operates in many country areas of Queensland.

Rural training schools in Queensland offer sub-tertiary certificate level courses which are intended to provide basic educational qualifications for those entering managerial positions on properties and farms. They offer a two-year residential course.

Several tertiary courses offered by the University of Queensland are available by correspondence through the University's Department of External Studies. The University had 950 students enrolled in external study courses in 1975.

THE PRE-SCHOOL CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM

The Pre-School Correspondence Program was launched in 1974 for children living in remote areas. Lessons consisted of a printed program with suggested activities for parents to use recorded material on cassette tapes, library resources and a kit of equipment. A detailed descriptive analysis of the Pre-School Correspondence Program is provided by Ashby, McGaw, and Perry (1975).

The information about the families enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program was obtained through a Background Information Sheet which parents were asked to complete when enrolling their children. A total of 453 children were enrolled in the 1975 Pre-School Correspondence Program but not all of them returned fully completed questionnaires.

The Children

The children enrolled in the program varied in age at 28 February 1975 from under four years to six years of age. From Table 7, which gives the distribution of children's ages, it can be seen that 78 per cent of the children were between four years and four years nine months of age at the commencement of the year. Those under four were strictly below the minimum age for enrolment. Although the ages of children varied by up to

two years, all children received the same set of program materials. The manner in which individual variation in the program for each child was to be achieved is discussed by Ashby, McGaw and Perry (1976).

Table 7: Age Distribution of Children Enrolled in Pre-School Correspondence Program in 1975

Age Range	Number	Percent
Under 4 years	3	0.7
4 years	30	6.8
4 yrs to 4 yrs 3 mths	113	25.5
4 yrs 3 mths to 4 yrs 6 mths	101	22.7
4 yrs 6 mths to 4 yrs 9 mths	101	22.7
4 yrs 9 mths to 5 yrs	69	15.5
5 yrs to 5 yrs 3 mths	22	5.0
5 yrs 3 mths to 5 yrs 6 mths	3	0.7
5 yrs 6 mths to 5 yrs 9 mths	0	0.0
5 yrs 9 mths to 6 yrs	2	0.4
Total	444	100.0

Four of the children enrolled in 1975 had been enrolled in 1974 as well. Since the materials were designed for a one year program any children enrolled for two years received essentially a duplicate set of materials in their second year.

Information sought about children's medical history in the Background Information Sheet revealed that 53.7 per cent of children were regarded by parents as not having had a notable childhood illness. Table 8 indicates the number of illnesses contracted by children. Sixty-seven of the children were reported to have had more than one illness.

In order to obtain some picture of the severity of the illnesses reported by the parents each illness reported was classified by a medical practitioner in terms of the categories used in Table 9. For each child only the most serious illness mentioned was coded, for example for a child who had contracted measles but also suffered from asthma only the asthma was coded. For 177 of the 181 children reported to have had illnesses it was possible to establish from the parents' responses whether, for the most serious illness, the child had been hospitalized. This information is also shown in Table 9.

Of all the children enrolled, 17 per cent had contracted serious illnesses. Among those who had actually contracted any illness at all, this group constituted 36 per cent. The rate of hospitalization increased with the severity of the illness, as would be expected, with 74 per cent of all children with serious illnesses having been hospitalized. Among those with normal childhood illnesses the rate was only 18.6 per cent.

Table 8: Number of Illnesses Contracted by Children

Number of Illnesses	Number	Percent
None	210	53.7
One	114	29.2
Two	43	11.0
Three	21	5.4
Four	3	0.7
Total	391	100.0

Table 9: Hospitalization Rate for Each Type of Illness

Type of Illness	Number with Illness	Number Hospitalized	Percent Hospitalized
Insufficient information	5	3	60.0
Normal Childhood illness	59	11	18.6
Recurring infections	47	20	42.5
Severe: short duration: full recovery	41	33	80.4
Severe: lengthy or recurring	15	6	40.0
Resulting in permanent damage/incapacity	9	9	100.0
Potentially lethal	1	1	100.0
Total	177	83	46.9

Without comparative information on the relative rates of hospitalization for urban children it is not possible to establish whether the geographical isolation of the families whose children are enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program leads them more or less often to resort to hospitalization for the treatment of illnesses with different levels of severity. From the point of view of the teachers in the Pre-School Correspondence Program the important thing is not overall patterns such as these but the individual implications of particular illnesses for particular children. To satisfy their needs the data required may actually be more detailed than that presently being obtained through the Background Information Sheet.

In addition to the illness which parents mentioned their children had had, at least one quarter of parents declared that their pre-school child had a special developmental problem about which they were concerned. The child's speech was noted by 52 percent of these 98 concerned parents as the source of the problem. Table 10 shows the nature of the problems. The 'other' category incorporates problems of an emotional and/or behavioural type. The tasks for teachers in assisting these parents are by no means

simple, though there are resource personnel on whom they can draw. The frequency with which the teachers sought to help and the parents' judgements of the helpfulness of teachers' efforts are discussed in McGaw, Ashby, Grant (1975) and McGaw, Ashby and Perry (1975).

Table 10: Problems of Children's Development Mentioned by Parents

Special Problems	Number	Percent
None	282	74.2
Sight	10	2.6
Hearing	3	0.8
Speech	50	13.1
Physical Disability	9	2.4
More than one	3	0.8
Other	23	6.1
Total	380	100.0

The Families

From the distribution of fathers' occupation, shown in Table 11, it is apparent that at least 77 per cent of the fathers of children enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program work on the land as graziers, farmers, sugar cane growers, farm hands and others. Some of the others whose occupations are listed in categories such as manager were also linked with rural industries. A conservative estimate would be that about 80 per cent of fathers had occupations associated with rural industries. The 62 fathers in the 'other' category were in separate categories in the occupational classification (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1971) in each of which there were fewer than five of them.

It is possible that the rules of eligibility for the Pre-School Correspondence Program favour the children of men on rural properties as opposed to other rural urban families. Fathers with occupations such as postmaster may live within 3.22 km of a relatively large school but access to pre-school facilities would be as remote a possibility for many of their children as it would for graziers' children.

Children are only eligible for enrolment in the Pre-School Correspondence Program, however, if they live more than 3.22 km from the nearest school or shall be attending a primary school with fewer than 35 children in the following year. The distance to the nearest primary school for all the children enrolled, for whom the information was available, is shown in Table 12. The 22 per cent of families who lived within 3.22 km of a primary school were close to small one and two teacher schools (Class V and VI schools) which the children would be attending in 1976. Children with a medical

condition which prevented their attendance at a normal pre-school could also have been admitted to the Pre-School Correspondence Program on medical grounds even though they lived within 3.22 km of a primary school of any size.

Table 11: Distribution of Father's Occupations

Code	Occupation	Number	Percent of Known
043	Teacher	6	1.5
119	Manager	7	1.8
301	Sugar Cane Growers	18	4.6
308	Grazier	197	49.9
314	Agricultural Farmer/Grazier	50	12.7
324	Farm Labourer/Station Hand	38	9.6
660	Electrician	6	1.5
772	Construction worker	6	1.5
785	Labourer	5	1.3
	Other (1 to 4 in each Occupation)	62	15.6
	Total	395	100.0

Table 12: Distances at which Children Live From Nearest Primary School

Distance	Number	Percent
Under 3.2 kms	90	21.7
3.2 to 20.5 kms	99	23.9
21 to 40.5 kms	83	20.0
41 to 100 kms	110	26.5
101 to 200 kms	27	6.5
200 to 320 kms	6	1.4
Total	415	100.0

Other children who live within 3.22 km of Class I to IV primary school, but for whom there are no available pre-school facilities, are presently not eligible for enrolment in the Pre-School Correspondence Program.

The distribution of the occupation of the mothers before and after marriage is shown in Table 13. As could be expected the greatest number of mothers with children in the Pre-School Correspondence Program have no present form of employment other than that of home duties. Of those who were working full or part-time, 18.2 per cent indicated that their occupation was grazier. Many of the women who classed themselves as housewives would also, in fact, be engaged in the same activities as those who stated 'grazier' as their occupation. Thus, the total number of women who did work as graziers, and farm-hands would be more than the 12 shown. Of those employed away from the home, the largest group was the eight who were teachers, while a further six had clerical jobs and another six were cooks.

Table 13: Distribution of Mothers' Occupations Before and After Marriage

Code	Occupation	Before Marriage		After Marriage	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
30	Nursing Sister	71	19.0	3	0.8
32	Dentists Nurse	11	3.0	0	0.0
42	Teacher–Tertiary	5	1.3	2	0.6
43	Teacher	45	12.1	8	2.2
150	Clerk	0	0.0	2	0.6
155	Shorthand Typist	52	13.9	0	0.0
163	Clerical/Secretarial duties	28	7.5	6	1.6
211	Shop Assistant	28	7.5	0	0.0
308	Grazier	0	0.0	12	3.3
324	Farm Worker/Station Hand	30	8.0	0	0.0
545	Telephonist	12	3.2	0	0.0
555	Postmistress	0	0.0	6	1.6
807	Cook	0	0.0	6	1.6
808	Hotel Employee	12	3.2	2	0.6
811	Child Care/Travel Hostess	7	1.9	0	0.0
815	Waitress	8	2.2	0	0.0
825	Hairdresser	5	1.3	0	0.0
860	Leading wren (Seaman)	0	0.0	2	0.6
866	Home Duties – Housewife/ Mother	11	3.0	298	81.9
	Other	48	12.9	17	4.6
	Total	373	100.0	364	100.0

Before marriage the mothers with children enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program were employed in many different occupations. The greatest single number, 22 per cent, were employed as nurses, while 13.9 per cent were shorthand typists, and 13.4 per cent were teachers. Table 13 also reveals that 8 per cent of mothers worked as station-farm workers before being married, a much greater percentage than that of workers in the general female workforce.

Among the families involved in the program 74 reported that adults, other than the parents, lived with the family. These could have been either relatives or employees. Governesses were employed by 12 families. A number of other families indicated that although they did not employ one in 1975, they had in the past, and would again when economic conditions improved. Although the duties of the governesses were to assist the school-age children with their correspondence lessons many did play a part in taking the Pre-School Correspondence Program as well. The teachers in the Pre-School Correspondence Program did ask parents to take responsibility for the pre-school program themselves and not to pass it over to governesses.

Parents were asked whether any language other than English was spoken in the home. The results are shown in Table 14. Of the 12 families who indicated that they spoke a language other than English, the majority spoke Italian. All materials in the Pre-School Correspondence Program are written in English and there are no translations available to these families.

Table 14: Languages Other Than English Spoken by Families

Language	Number	Percent
Italian	5	41.7
German	1	8.3
Yugoslavian	1	8.3
Other European	4	33.4
Other	1	8.3
Total	12	100.0

Although most parents mentioned decided advantages of their place of residence, 59 per cent also gave at least one disadvantage of remote area living when given the opportunity in the Background Information Sheet. The number of disadvantages mentioned by each of the parents is shown in Table 15.

The first disadvantage given by each family was analysed for its content. The disadvantage most mentioned was that of having no regular social contact available for their children and themselves. This constituted 58 per cent of all responses and was made up of comments by 49.8 per cent about the isolation of children from others their own age, 5.3 per cent who felt their children were shy because of this lack of contact and 2.4 per cent who noted the excessive distances to friends. These and others mentioned are listed in Table 16. These figures would seem to indicate a need for group meetings of families enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program. Local meetings of parents were organized on a limited basis in 1975 for some parents. The general views of parents toward such meetings is reported in McGaw, Ashby and Grant (1975).

Table 15: Numbers of Disadvantages Mentioned by Parents

Number	Number	Percent
None	150	41.6
One	129	35.7
Two	68	18.8
Three	9	2.5
Four	5	1.4
Total	36	100.0

Table 16: Types of Disadvantages Mentioned by Parents

Disadvantage	Number	Percent
Isolation from children of own age	103	49.8
Shyness due to lack of social contact	11	5.3
Lack of organized pre-school facilities	25	12.1
Unavailability of group activities (e.g. Scouts)	5	2.4
Unavailability of experiences at coast and in cities	14	6.8
Distance to be travelled to school	8	3.9
Effects of boarding at school on family life	5	2.4
Superiority of schools in cities	5	2.4
Unavailability of classes for cultural and sporting activities	5	2.4
Distance from friends	5	2.4
Other	21	10.1
Total	207	100.0

Communication Services

Despite the isolated existence of many families, 98 per cent received a mail service at least once per week. The frequency of mail services is given in Table 17. In the time since parents gave this information a number of country mail services have been reduced. Between July 1974 and December 1975, 26 services were cut back and one was cancelled. The post office has estimated that a further 30 services will be reduced by July 1976. These cut-backs were due to increased postal charges and a reduction in the number of items being mailed.

Table 17: Frequency of Mail Services

Service	Number	Percent
Daily	63	16.0
Twice per week	207	52.7
Once per week	116	29.5
Once per fortnight	3	0.8
Once per month	1	0.2
Less than once per month	1	0.8
Total	393	100.0

Although 98 per cent mentioned that officially they received a weekly service, only 37 per cent received their mail without delay in the 'wet season'. The remaining 63 per cent experienced delays ranging from one to twelve weeks in the summer period The length of delays is set out in Table 18.

Table 18: Mail Delays in the 'Wet' Season

Delay	Number	Percent
None	147	37.3
Yes one week	97	24.6
two weeks	49	12.4
three weeks	33	8.4
four weeks	20	5.1
more than four weeks	48	12.2
Total	394	100.0

Cassette player-recorders were owned by 62 per cent of families as shown in Table 19. It was expected that during the course of 1975 many of the remainder would acquire one because, in April 1975 for the first time families with children enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program became eligible for a Commonwealth Grant of $120-00 per annum to purchase equipment such as record-players, educational toys and materials for pre-school activities. To receive this grant parents of children who are enrolled in the State Pre-School Correspondence Program must apply to the Commonwealth Department of Education.

Among the other resources available to the families it is interesting to note that 4.8 per cent were unable even to receive radio broadcasts. Over one quarter could not receive television but, of those who could, 81 per cent owned television receivers. The

81 families who own radio transceivers were able to communicate with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the School of the Air. Of all families enrolled, only 27 per cent did not have 240 volt power and most of them had 32 volt power supplies.

Table 19: Equipment and Services Available to Families

Equipment	Yes		No	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Cassette Player/Recorder	247	62.5	148	37.5
240 Power	288	72.9	107	27.1
T.V. Broadcasts	295	74.7	100	25.3
Own T.V.	238	60.3	157	39.7
A.B.C. (*)	375	95.2	19	4.8
Transceiver	81	20.6	312	79.4

(*) Australian Broadcasting Commission – the ABC operates an extensive radio network throughout Australia.

MAJOR FINDINGS

This report has sought to provide general information about the State of Queensland, its educational facilities for children and the special provisions made for children living in more remote areas. It has also provided information about the families enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program. More detailed information, based on extensive interviews with a random sample of the families is presented by McGaw, Ashby and Grant (1975).

From the analyses of the information provided by the parents in the Background Information Sheet, the following characteristics of the families enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program emerge.

1. The age distribution of children enrolled ranges from four to six years with 345 children between four years and four years nine months of age at the commencement of the school year.

2. At least one illness was contracted by 46 per cent of children. Of the children who had been ill 23 per cent had had an illness labelled by a medical consultant as being 'severe of short duration, with full recovery' and a further 14 per cent as 'severe of lengthy or recurring nature', 'resulting in permanent damage or incapacity' or 'potentially lethal'.

3. The rate of hospitalization was related to the type of illness endured by the child. A higher rate of hospitalization was evident for the more serious illnesses than the rate for normal childhood illnesses. Overall 51 per cent of children treated were hospitalized for their medical treatment.

4. Over one-quarter of parents mentioned a specific developmental problem for their child. For one half of these concerned parents the problem was related to the child's speech.

5. Of the fathers who revealed their present occupations, as many as 80 per cent indicated that they were linked with rural industries. They had occupations such as graziers, farm hands and harvesting contractors. Approximately 80 per cent of the families lived more than 3.22 km from a primary school and would thus become eligible for primary education by correspondence if they did not choose to travel further to school. The remaining 20 per cent would commence their primary education in small one and two teacher schools.

6. Most of the mothers had only home duties and were in a position to provide their children with the pre-school program themselves. The others would have fitted the program around their part-time or full-time employment or arranged for another to take responsibility for it.

7. Of the families in the program 74 had adults other than parents living with them. Twelve of the families employed governesses.

8. Of the 12 families who spoke a language other than English at home, five spoke Italian. No materials, however, were printed in any language other than English.

9. In response to a specific request to verbalize any disadvantages which they felt were inherent in living in more remote areas of the State, 58.6 per cent of the parents did mention at least one. The main one mentioned being that of the lack of regular social contact for both children and parents. Many families also offered decided advantages of their place of residence.

10. Most families officially receive a mail service at least once per week. However, it must be recognized that 62.7 per cent experience delays for some of up to twelve weeks, in the 'wet' season.

11. The majority of families have a cassette recorder/player, 240 volt power, television, and A.B.C. reception but there are some who had none of these.

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